

## Safe and Healthy Picnicking

Hamburgers, watermelon, potato salad – summer is a great time to enjoy the outdoors with a barbeque or picnic. But if food is not handled safely or cooked properly, your fun family outing can quickly lead to a miserable bout of foodborne diarrheal disease.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimate 76 million Americans get sick from food each year. Two out of every 10 of those sicknesses are from food that is incorrectly prepared by individuals, not by restaurants. Protecting yourself from harmful bacteria and foodborne illness is up to you.

During the summer months, there are more cases of foodborne illness. Bacteria in food, soil and water multiply more quickly during the hot, humid summer months. Also, people are outdoors more often, grilling out and picnicking. Safety measures in your kitchen, such as hot water, refrigeration and adequate cooking appliances may not be available as you cook outdoors.

You can't see, smell or taste bacteria, so it is important to take precautions to keep your food safe and protect yourself from foodborne illness.

**Clean** – Wash your hands with soap and water before handling food, after using the restroom and after changing a diaper. If you are traveling, pack water for drinking and washing. Use disposable towels for drying hands, dishes and utensils.

**Separate** – Avoid cross contamination. Wrap raw meat securely or place it in a separate ice chest to avoid drippings contaminating other food. Wash utensils and plates that have held raw meat before re-using them for cooked meat. Keep ice for drinks in a sealed bag.

**Cook** – Cook meat for the proper amount of time at recommended temperatures to kill harmful bacteria. Hamburgers should be cooked to an internal temperature of 160°F. Use a meat thermometer inserted into the center of meat for at least 30 seconds to get an accurate temperature. Meat that is grilled or marinated can darken on the outside before it is completely cooked on the inside. Do not partially pre-cook meats. Wait until you are ready to eat and then cook the meat thoroughly. Partial cooking allows bacteria to survive and multiply to the point that additional cooking can't destroy them.

**Chill** – Perishable foods should be kept in an insulated ice chest with several inches of ice, ice packs or frozen water. Replenish the ice as necessary. Keep your ice chests in a cool, shady spot whenever possible. Pack drinks in a separate ice chest so the one with meat in it won't be opened very often. Items that are left out of the ice chest for more than one hour when the temperature outside is 90°F should be thrown away.

Foodborne illnesses usually start within 1 to 3 days, but they can strike as quickly as within 20 minutes, or as long as 6 weeks after you eat contaminated food. You might have diarrhea, stomach cramps, a fever, a headache, vomiting, severe exhaustion and sometimes blood or pus in your stool. Your symptoms will probably last only 1 or 2 days, but they can stick with you for up to 10 days.

Most healthy people only get a mild case of foodborne illness and should be sure to drink plenty of fluids until they feel better. Children, pregnant women, senior adults and people with compromised immune systems may develop more severe illness. If your symptoms become severe, contact your health care provider.

For more information on picnic safety, call the Springfield-Greene County Health Department at 417-864-1658.